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SENATE COMMITTEE APPROVES DORGAN AMENDMENT TO LIFT FOOD AND MEDICINE TRADE SANCTIONS AGAINST CUBA

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) --- The U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee voted Tuesday to lift the 40 year old food and medicine embargo against Cuba, action which could pave the way to opening that long off-limits market to U.S. farm exports. U.S. Senators Byron Dorgan and Senator Slade Gorton (R-WA) offered the amendment that would lift the embargo during Senate Appropriations Committee consideration of the Agriculture Appropriations bill Tuesday. It was overwhelmingly approved on a voice vote.

The matter will next be considered by the full United States Senate. Similar legislation is also working its way through the U.S. House.

"This is an important vote for American farmers and an important vote for common sense," Dorgan said after the committee vote Tuesday. Continuing the embargo against Cuba makes no sense. After 40 years, it is clear it hasn't worked. It merely provides Fidel Castro with an excuse to blame every problem in Cuba on the United States."

"The committee correctly recognized an important fact here," Dorgan added. "This embargo only hurts poor people and sick people. Fidel Castro hasn't missed a meal or medication because of it."

Cuba imports nearly a billion dollars in food each year, Dorgan noted, and said that amount is expected to grow significantly in coming years. "To continue the U.S. embargo only hurts the Cuban people and American farmers, who are denied a potentially valuable export market."

Last year, Dorgan went to Cuba to explore issues surrounding the current U.S. trade embargo and to investigate health care and other humanitarian efforts on behalf of the Cuban people.

Upon his return to the U.S. following those meetings, Dorgan and Ashcroft asked the Senate to approve legislation to lift the embargo. Both the Appropriations Committee and the full Senate voted to do so, but House leaders adjourned the conference committee working out differences between House and Senate versions of last year's Agriculture Appropriations bill rather than allow a vote on the proposal. As a result, the Cuba embargo remains in effect.

In addition to ending the food and medicine embargo against Cuba, the amendment would lift all unilateral food and medicine embargoes the U.S. now has in place.

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